

A MARBLE RELIEF  
OF THE THEODOSIAN PERIOD

ERNST KITZINGER

This study is in substance identical with a paper delivered at the Symposium on "The Dumbarton Oaks Collection: Studies in Byzantine Art" held at Dumbarton Oaks in May 1958.

I wish to thank Professor G. Sotiriou (Athens), Professor M. Gorenc (Zagreb), and Professor K. Wessel (formerly Berlin), for their courtesy in sending me the photographs reproduced in figures 8, 12, and 18 respectively and for granting me permission to publish these prints. Figure 15 is a detail from a negative in the possession of the German Archaeological Institute in Rome, reproduced here thanks to the kindness of Professors F. W. Deichmann and J. Kollwitz.

IN 1952 Mr. and Mrs. Bliss gave to the Dumbarton Oaks Collection a fragmentary marble relief depicting Christ healing a blind man (fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The object merits a detailed study, partly because of its high artistic quality and partly because it bears so unmistakably the imprint of its art-historical habitat.

Before discussing its date and place of origin it will be well to give a description of the relief. The fragment, which is of white (Proconnesian?) marble, has a height of 26.5 cm. and a width of 28.7 cm. It is evidently incomplete at the top, where the present edge cuts off part of Christ's halo, as well as on the left and on the right. Yet all three edges are fairly smooth, a fact which suggests that the present size and shape of the relief are not the result of mere accident, but that its edges were trimmed with a tool in order to reduce it for use as a panel, approximately square in shape. Moreover, the condition of these three edges indicates that the trimming took place quite a long time ago. Only at the top of the right-hand edge, where the outline becomes irregular and the surface of the edge is very clean, is there a suggestion of recent breakage. A small piece seems to have been chipped off here subsequent to the original trimming (see fig. 10).

The only edge which is authentic and intact is the bottom one. It consists of a slightly curved frame, about 2 cm. wide, which is raised about 1.5 cm. above the surface of the relief, thus forming a sloping ledge for the figures to stand on. The frame is adorned by a row of big round beads. In the middle of these, just under the figure of Christ, is a small disk with an equal-armed cross in relief. The thickness of the slab—not including the raised frame or the figures which stand out in relief—is approximately 2 cm. No accurate measurement of this dimension is possible because of the extreme roughness of the back of the slab (fig. 11).

Christ stands squarely in the center of the fragment. Youthful and beardless, He wears His hair short and combed down smoothly over His forehead. His is the only head in the relief which is surrounded by a halo. He is dressed in a tunic of which the lower hem is visible just above His ankles while the wide sleeve covers His arm down to about His elbow. Over the tunic He wears a pallium, one end of which is draped over His left shoulder and arm, while the other is pulled across His body at the waist and cascades from His left wrist. On His feet the straps of His sandals are distinctly though lightly indicated in relief. Carrying a rolled-up *volumen* in His left hand, Christ turns His head half right and touches with the index finger of His raised right hand the left (or far) eye of the blind man who is seen in profile on His right approaching Him in a stooping position. The invalid is dressed in the short girded tunic which in the late Roman period characterized its wearer as a member of the working class,

<sup>1</sup> No. 52.8. *Handbook of the Dumbarton Oaks Collection* (Washington, D.C., 1955), p. 17, no. 41 and p. 33 (ill.).

and plain sock-shaped boots (*socci*?). He shows much the same facial type as Christ, and although he appears to be even more youthful he would, if erect, be a figure of about the same height. Both his hands reach forward towards the Saviour whose miracle-working arm he seems about to clasp. Actually, however, the blind man's left hand, of which only one finger is visible behind Christ's arm, must be assumed to be holding the top end of the heavy gnarled stick the outlines of which are incised on the empty ground between the two figures. It is, therefore, his right hand only that reaches out in eager anticipation towards his benefactor, while in his left he carries the stick which supports his stooping body and at the same time serves to guide his steps. Evidently, then, his sight has not yet been restored. Indeed, his eyes seem vacant and without life (fig. 13).

On Christ's left and aligned with Him on the same plane is an impressive figure of a companion or witness, which echoes that of the Saviour almost exactly in stance, attire, and position of arms. He is an older man, somewhat shorter than Christ and distinguished by a domed, bald forehead, a drooping moustache, and a long pointed beard. In his left hand, instead of a scroll he holds a scepter in the form of a cross which rests against his shoulder and the top of which extends above his head. Most of the upper part of this scepter, however, is lost owing to the break previously noted, and only one cross-arm remains. The bearded companion's right hand, part of which is concealed by Christ's shoulder, echoes the dramatic action of Christ's right hand; it is raised in an expressive gesture with the palm facing the beholder. Just above this hand there appears the head of another figure, presumably a second witness. Executed in low relief (in keeping with its position in the background), this head is of the same general type as Christ's and the blind man's. It is shown in semi-profile and its glance is directed not at what Christ is doing, but towards the scepter-bearing figure, thus lending added emphasis to the latter and picking up—by way of counterpoint to the major action portrayed—the secondary and contrary movement initiated by the invalid's eager profile. The body of the background figure must be assumed to be completely concealed behind Christ, but one hand is faintly visible in the space between the bearded man's head and right hand (fig. 14). It is executed in very low relief and its action is not altogether clear.

So much for the appearance of the relief. About its history, prior to its arrival at Dumbarton Oaks, little is known.<sup>2</sup> It is all the more fortunate that the stylistic character of the carving should be so unmistakable. The figures, in fact, bear all the characteristics that one finds in sculptures done in Constantinople toward the end of the fourth century, and specifically in the time of Theodosius I. Consider, for instance, the heads in the imperial entourage on the Theodosian reliefs of the base of the obelisk in the Hippodrome (figs. 2, 3).<sup>3</sup> The collective description of the faces on these reliefs which Kollwitz gives in his exhaustive study of Theodosian sculpture can be applied almost in its entirety to the head of Christ on our relief (fig. 4). He speaks of the large oval of the face with its softly rounded cheeks and full jaws; of the hair evenly combed down-

<sup>2</sup> It was formerly in the collection of Levi Benzion, who is said to have acquired it in Egypt.

<sup>3</sup> J. Kollwitz, *Oströmische Plastik der theodosianischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1941), pl. 35 f.



ward and forming a gentle wave which covers a large part of the forehead; of the gently ascending brow line and its sudden downward bend at the root of the nose; of the small cavities indicating the pupils; of the rather heavy eyelids outlined by grooves of which the upper ones deepen as they approach the nose; and, finally, of the large ears which are set rather low and are completely uncovered.<sup>4</sup> The figures in their entirety are equally characteristic products of the period. Their closest parallels are the apostles on the so-called Sarcophagus of a Prince found in Constantinople in 1933 and now in the Archaeological Museum (fig. 6),<sup>5</sup> and those on a fragmentary relief from Bakırköy, also in the same Museum (fig. 5).<sup>6</sup> The extremely soft draperies of the latter carving, with their folds lacking definite beginnings and ends and with lights playing gently over the highly polished surface, thus blurring all contours, are particularly similar, though compared with the Bakırköy figures ours are sturdier and much better defined anatomically. In this respect they are closer to the apostles on the Prince's Sarcophagus who also wear the same type of sandals as Christ and His companion to the right on our relief. All three works have in common another characteristic of Theodosian style, namely, a tendency for figures to lean over slightly.

In the light of Kollwitz' detailed study it is not necessary for me to insist on the fact that this soft, smooth, and delicate style which so obviously strives after classical ideals of formal perfection is characteristic of only a short period in Constantinopolitan sculpture, a period which coincides with Theodosius' reign (379-395). Only a few years later, in the reign of Arcadius, forms begin to harden noticeably,<sup>7</sup> while even the closest known derivatives of the Theodosian style *outside* the capital, namely, certain sarcophagus reliefs at Ravenna, exhibit different stylistic nuances.<sup>8</sup> We can say with confidence, therefore, that our marble was carved in Constantinople about the year 390.

To our concept of the sculptural style of that period in the capital the relief adds hardly anything new. One feature not previously noticed in other works is the use of incised lines to indicate the most distant objects (cf. especially the stick carried by the blind man). We shall have occasion later to refer to some Western ivory carvings which are products of a phase parallel to, and perhaps to

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 46 and p. 132 ff.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 48 and p. 153 ff.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 166 and *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> For Ravenna sarcophagi closely related to Constantinopolitan work see *ibid.*, p. 155 ff., and especially Kollwitz' more recent study *Die Sarkophage Ravennas*, Freiburger Universitätsreden, N.F., Heft 21 (Freiburg i. B., 1956), p. 10 ff. The sarcophagus of Liberius in S. Francesco, which appears to be the most "Greek" and "classical" in this Ravennatic group, was first thought by Kollwitz to have been drastically restored in modern times (*Oströmische Plastik*, p. 165, note 5) and is now considered by him a Renaissance imitation after ancient models (*Die Sarkophage Ravennas*, p. 61; *idem*, "Il problema del sarcofago ravennate detto di Liberio," *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina, Ravenna, 11-24 marzo 1956*, II [Ravenna, 1956], p. 61 ff.). G. Bovini, on the other hand, speaks only of the possibility of "qualche ritocco," especially in the faces (*Sarcofagi paleocristiani di Ravenna* [Città del Vaticano, 1954], p. 32), and this view seems to be borne out by the more detailed demonstration offered by G. de Francovich in a recent study ("Studi sulla scultura ravennate, I: I sarcofagi," *Felix Ravenna*, 77-78 [August-December 1958], p. 5 ff., esp. p. 12 ff.; *ibid.*, p. 20 ff., a stylistic analysis in which both the Constantinopolitan affinities of this sarcophagus and the features differentiating it from work done in the Eastern capital are duly stressed).

some extent influenced by, Theodosian art in Constantinople, and in which the same device is used.<sup>8a</sup>

While the dating and attribution of the Dumbarton Oaks fragment pose no particular difficulty, we face much harder problems when trying to visualize and define the object of which it formed a part and the setting for which that object was made.

Our principal guide in exploring these questions is the lower edge of the relief with its curved outline and its series of beads. The existence of this frame indicates that the relief cannot have stood vertically. Though it conceivably might be part of a roundel inserted in a wall in an upright position, a much more natural supposition is that it was placed horizontally.

There exists, in fact, a whole class of marble slabs of the kind we are presuming in this instance. The class is well known and has been studied repeatedly.<sup>9</sup> New examples turn up from time to time.<sup>10</sup> The more complete ones leave no

<sup>8a</sup> Cf. e. g., K. Wessel, "Eine Gruppe oberitalischer Elfenbeinarbeiten," *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts*, 63/64 (1948/49), p. 111 ff., esp. pp. 117, 120.

<sup>9</sup> E. Michon, "Rebords de bassins chrétiens ornés de reliefs," *Revue biblique*, n. s., XII (1915), p. 485 ff.; XIII (1916), p. 121 ff. (survey of all pieces known at that time). G. A. S. Snyder, "The so-called Puteal in the Capitoline Museum at Rome," *Journal of Roman Studies*, XIII (1923), p. 56 ff. E. Thomas, "Bruchstück einer frühchristlichen Marmortischplatte mit Reliefverzierung aus Csopak," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, III, 3 (1955), p. 261 ff. (with an incomplete list of examples compiled evidently without knowledge of Michon's basic survey).

<sup>10</sup> I append here a list of additional pieces which have come to my attention and which are not mentioned in any of the studies quoted in footnote 9:

Antioch — *Antioch-on-the-Orontes I: The Excavations of 1932* (Princeton, London, and The Hague, 1934), p. 49 f. and fig. 4.

Athens — D. I. Pallas in 'Αρχαιολογική 'Εφημερίς (1930), p. 90 ff. (two fragments, from Arcadia and Melos, in Byzantine Museum).

Chicago — *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, XVII, 4 (1923), p. 38 f. E. Michon in *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1923), p. 170 ff. (fragment, allegedly from Mesopotamia, in Art Institute).

Crimea — *Отчет of the Imperial Archaeological Commission* (1902), p. 37 f. and fig. 60 a, b. E. Michon in *Bulletin de la Société Nationale des Antiquaires de France* (1920), p. 253 ff. (two fragments found outside church in excavation in Chersonese).

Hama — H. Ingholt, *Rapport préliminaire sur sept campagnes de fouilles à Hama en Syrie (1932-38)* (Copenhagen, 1940), p. 137 f. and pl. 42, 2.

Herakleion (Crete) — A. Orlandos in *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher*, VI (1928), p. 160 ff. (two fragments from Gortyna in Museum).

Istanbul — Two recently acquired and unpublished fragments in the Museum, knowledge of which I owe to Dr. C. A. Mango; one shows a recumbent figure beneath a tree, the other parts of two animals.

Jerusalem — Two unpublished fragments in the Palestine Archaeological Museum, knowledge of which I owe to Prof. H. Ingholt; one depicts animal fights, the other a satyr and a maenad.

Nea Anchialos — G. A. Sotiriou in 'Αρχαιολογική 'Εφημερίς (1929), p. 102 and fig. 137, top left. Pallas, *ibid.* (1930), p. 94 f. and fig. 4.

New York — Two pieces, both unpublished, were on the art market in 1958; one, allegedly from Egypt, is a complete, sigma-shaped slab with a relief border depicting a sea thiasos; the other is a fragment of a curved border depicting a head in profile and a hunting scene.

Nicosia — A. H. S. Megaw in *Kypriaka Grammata* (1956), p. 171 and fig. 4; *The Swedish Cyprus Expedition*, IV, 3 (Stockholm, 1956), p. 103 f. and pl. XIX, 3 (fragment from Salamis in Cyprus Museum; I owe the references to Mr. Megaw).

Rhodes — A. K. Orlandos, 'Αρχαίον τῶν βυζαντινῶν μνημείων τῆς Ἑλλάδος, VI (1948), p. 18 ff. and fig. 15.

Varna — F. Gerke, *Der Tischaltar des Bernard Gilduin in Saint Sernin in Toulouse*, Mainz. Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Abhandlungen der geistes- und sozialwissenschaftlichen Klasse (1958), no. 8, pp. 457, 464 and figs. 9, 10.

Vienna — R. Noll, *Vom Altertum zum Mittelalter*, exhibition catalog (Vienna, 1958), p. 24, nos. 1 and 2 (two fragments—one from Sirmium, the other of unknown provenance—in the Kunsthistorische Museum; I owe knowledge of these pieces to Dr. O. Demus).

doubt that we are dealing with marble table tops having a plain surface and a broad raised border adorned with figure reliefs and rimmed with beads (fig. 8). The subject matter of the reliefs in many instances is secular; mythological scenes, hunts, animal fights, pastoral and marine subjects all occur frequently. But there are also numerous instances in which the themes are biblical; witness, for instance, a fragmentary piece from Sbeitla which shows a sequence of scenes familiar from the iconography of catacomb frescoes and Early Christian sarcophagi, namely, the Raising of Lazarus, Noah's Ark, the Ascension of Elijah, Adam and Eve, and David with his sling.<sup>11</sup> In the majority of Christian examples of these table tops we find similarly disjointed sequences of biblical events whose common denominator is their relationship to the idea of salvation or of divine intervention on behalf of those in peril; the kind of subject so familiar from the art of the catacombs. As in the latter, Old Testament subjects by far predominate.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Raising of Lazarus which appears on the fragment from Sbeitla is very nearly the only Gospel scene so far known on these table borders, aside from the Dumbarton Oaks fragment now under discussion.<sup>13</sup>

I have said that the common characteristic of this whole class of table tops is the raised relief band with beaded rim. In shape, however, there is no uniformity. While some examples are circular,<sup>14</sup> others have the so-called sigma shape<sup>15</sup> known from many pictorial representations of late classical and early Christian times to have been one of the most common shapes of dining room tables. No example is known to me of a table top of this class that is definitely square or rectangular. It must be borne in mind, however, that the vast majority of known examples consist of fragments. Many of them are curved, while others are straight. Usually it is not possible to decide whether the straight fragments come from a rectangular or a sigma-shaped table, while in the case of curved fragments there is usually uncertainty as to whether the slab, when complete, was sigma-shaped or round. In the case of our fragment at Dumbarton Oaks we are obviously faced with this latter uncertainty. The reconstruction drawing (fig. 7), which I owe to the kindness of Mr. R. L. Van Nice, has been based on the assumption that the slab was circular, but the sigma shape is equally possible.

Before enquiring into the possible use of our object some features should be mentioned which distinguish it from the general run of specimens of the class to which I have referred. By and large the sixty odd known examples of these table tops with relief borders are remarkably uniform, so that in-so-far as our

<sup>11</sup> Michon, *Revue biblique* (1915), p. 502 ff. and pl. I, 1. A. Merlin in *Revue tunisienne* (1917), p. 279 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Aside from the Old Testament subjects already mentioned in connection with the piece from Sbeitla one finds the Three Youths in the Fiery Furnace, the Sacrifice of Isaac, Daniel in the Lions' Den, and the story of Jonah.

<sup>13</sup> The Raising of Lazarus occurs once more on a fragment in the Museum of Istanbul. This fragment depicts, in addition, a scene interpreted by Mendel as the Parable of the Figtree (G. Mendel, *Catalogue des sculptures grecques, romaines et byzantines*, II [Constantinople, 1914], p. 430 ff., no. 655; Michon, *op. cit.* [1915], p. 525 ff., no. 15; pls. II, III).

<sup>14</sup> E. g. Michon, *op. cit.* (1915), p. 520 ff., no. 11 = our fig. 8 (Athens, from Thera); Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 56 and pl. 1 (Rome); also the slab in Rhodes referred to in note 10 *supra*. In these instances the circle is fully, or almost fully, preserved, so that there can be no doubt about the original shape.

<sup>15</sup> E. g. the slabs from Hama and in New York referred to in note 10 *supra*. Cf. also a sigma-shaped slab from Salona in Zagreb (Michon, *op. cit.* [1915], p. 509 ff., no. 5; see our fig. 12 and *infra*, p. 27 f.).

piece differs from them it is in effect unique. This is especially true of its size. With a relief band 26.5 cm. wide—and evidently not entirely complete at that—the border was almost twice as wide as the borders of these table tops normally are. On the basis of the curvature of the rim, Mr. Van Nice has computed the total diameter of the presumed circular slab as having been about 1 m. 80, while normally the diameters of these circular slabs range from about 1 m. 10 to 1 m. 40. Another feature that sets our piece apart is the character of the beading. In the vast majority of cases this consists of the classical bead-and-reel motif; in some of beads only which, however, are small and somewhat elongated.<sup>16</sup> I know of only one fragment presumed to have belonged to a table top which has a beaded rim comparable to ours, namely, a piece in the Art Museum in Budapest. Of the figure frieze of this object only an animal remains.<sup>17</sup>

A third point which is distinctive is the roughness of the edge and back of our slab (figs. 9 and 11). It is true that in many instances the publications of the table tops of our class do not permit us to judge what the sides and the backs look like. But in those cases where a judgement is possible the backs are reasonably or entirely smooth.<sup>18</sup> In our case it is inconceivable that the slab was exposed to view in the manner of an ordinary table top supported by legs or a solid base. It must have been embedded in some fashion. How exceptional it is in this respect obviously cannot be judged without subjecting all the members of the group to a scrutiny such as cannot be carried out on the basis of published materials.

In trying to determine the purpose which our slab may have served we must avoid what would almost certainly be a fallacious premise, namely, that all the table tops of the same type, let alone this exceptionally large and splendid piece with its distinctive features, could have been put to only one use.<sup>19</sup> The finds are

<sup>16</sup> Michon, *op. cit.*, 1915, p. 515, no. 8 and pl. I, 2; 1916, p. 124, no. 21; p. 126f., no. 22; p. 140, no. 34. Snyder, *op. cit.*, pl. II, no. 1812. Also the pieces in Chicago and Varna quoted *supra* in note 10.

<sup>17</sup> A. Hekler, *Die Sammlung Antiker Skulpturen*, Museum der bildenden Künste in Budapest (1929) p. 147, no. 143. For the same type of beaded rim in metalwork see *infra*, note 20.

<sup>18</sup> In several instances publications include drawings of profiles and these invariably show the back to have been carefully finished; cf. P. Sticotti, *Die römische Stadt Doclea in Montenegro*, Kaiserliche Akademie der Wissenschaften, Schriften der Balkankommission, Antiquarische Abteilung, VI (Vienna, 1913), col. 152, fig. 93, and the publications of pieces in Athens and Herakleion referred to in note 10 *supra*. The pieces in New York referred to in the same note also have smooth and carefully worked backs, as I was able to ascertain personally, thanks to the kindness of the owners. G. Mendel describes the backs of two of the pieces in the Museum of Istanbul as "soigneusement dressée" (*op. cit.*, II, nos. 654 and 655, pp. 426, 430); that of a third as "dressée, non polie" (*ibid.*, no. 485, p. 169). Michon characterizes the backs of a number of pieces in Paris as "simplement dressée" (*op. cit.* [1915], p. 515, no. 8; p. 517, no. 9; p. 539, no. 18; [1916], p. 136, no. 30).

<sup>19</sup> Most scholars who have discussed the possible uses of these table tops have based their theses on this premise, at least so far as the examples with Christian subjects are concerned. O. Wulff suggested that they have to do with the *agape* (*Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Beschreibung der Bildwerke der christlichen Epoche. Altchristliche, mittelalterliche byzantinische und italienische Bildwerke*, I [Berlin, 1909], p. 11, no. 21); Mendel seems to have thought that both the pagan and the Christian examples were connected chiefly with the cult of the dead (*op. cit.*, II, p. 425ff., especially, p. 429f.), while Michon, the first to attempt a systematic survey of the whole material, came to the conclusion that all of these objects, regardless of whether the subject matter of their reliefs was pagan or Christian, were used in churches as basins for liturgical ablutions (*op. cit.* [1916], p. 146ff., especially p. 163ff.). Sotiriou, on the other hand, has interpreted the slabs—especially, but not exclusively, those adorned with biblical subjects—as table tops used in the prothesis and this interpretation has been adopted also by other Greek scholars (Sotiriou, in 'Αρχαιολογική Ἐφημερίς [1929], p. 233f., *Idem, Guide du*

so numerous and so widespread that we are evidently dealing with what is basically a common type of utensil in the late classical world, though by far the greater part of the examples comes from the Eastern rather than the Western half of the Mediterranean. The type, as has long been recognized, originated in pagan metalwork. These marble slabs with their decorations are, in fact, large scale imitations of sumptuous silver platters.<sup>20</sup> The fact that there are more examples with pagan and secular subjects than with Christian ones suggests that these tables had been in common use before the type was adopted by the Church. If, however, we cannot be sure that all tables of the same type served the same purpose—or that all tables of different types served different purposes—it will be necessary to cast our net rather wide and consider in broad terms the uses to which tables were put in Christian contexts. In doing so it will soon become apparent that, for our particular piece at least, certain uses are much less likely than others, even though it will not be possible to conclude in completely unambiguous fashion what its original setting was and what purpose it actually served.

Since, as we have seen, the iconographic repertory of the tables with biblical friezes is that of the catacombs and early sarcophagi—and in this respect our fragment with the scene of Christ healing a blind man is no exception—it is natural to think first of *sepulchral* uses. Tables of various sizes and shapes, including the circle and the sigma, occur, in fact, quite frequently in early Christian funerary contexts. They may form actual covers or housings of tombs, as is frequently the case in Salona,<sup>21</sup> and in a number of instances in North Africa,<sup>22</sup>

*musée byzantin d'Athènes* [Athens, 1932], p. 34; J. M. Barnea, *Tò παλαιοχριστιανικόν συσταστήριον* [Athens, 1940], p. 129; A. K. Orlandos, *Ἡ ξυλόστεγος παλαιοχριστιανική βασιλική*, II [Athens, 1954], p. 486 ff.). E. Thomas, on iconographic grounds, suggests more specifically a connection with the rite of the blessing of the offerings (*op. cit.*, p. 271).

<sup>20</sup> A. Xyngopoulos in *Ἀρχαιολογική Ἐφημερίς* (1914), p. 77 ff.; Snyder, *op. cit.*, p. 59 ff., especially p. 65. It is interesting to note that in metalwork of the fourth century one frequently finds a heavy beaded border substituted for the classical bead-and-reel (W. Grünhagen, *Der Schatzfund von Gross Bodungen* [Berlin, 1954], p. 39). In this respect, too, the sculptors of marble table tops followed suit, as our fragment and that in Budapest show (see *supra*, note 17).

<sup>21</sup> E. Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity* (Oslo, 1951), p. 105 ff. and fig. V, 21 ff. The potentially great usefulness of this book is impaired by the fact that the text is written in all but unintelligible English.

<sup>22</sup> In North Africa the Christian funerary monument in form of a table is based on a strong pagan tradition of long standing; cf. W. Deonna, "Mobilier délien, I: Tables antiques d'offrandes avec écuclles et table d'autel chrétien," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, LVIII (1934), p. 1 ff.; especially p. 12 ff. and p. 76 ff. In many instances the *mensa* was not found *in situ*, so that the physical relationship between it and the tomb is difficult to determine, but the funerary purpose is frequently attested by inscriptions (see the references given by Deonna, *op. cit.*, p. 77, note 2; also F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, I, col. 829 f.). At Tipasa, on the other hand, there is a whole series of *mensae* which are most intimately connected with tombs, the latter being encased in them in such a way that a banquet could be held directly on top of the burial. While some of these *mensae* were thought at one time to have been tables for the *agape* into which sarcophagi were subsequently inserted (St. Gsell, *Les monuments antiques de l'Algérie*, II [Paris, 1901], pp. 332 f., 336 f.), more recent investigators believe that these tombs were built in the form of tables from the outset (E. Albertini and L. Leschi, "Le cimetière de Sainte-Salsa à Tipasa de Mauretanie," *Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres: Comptes-rendus* [1932], p. 77 ff., especially p. 81 f.; for further examples see *Bulletin archéologique* [1941–42], p. 355 ff.). This conclusion is borne out also by analogous finds in Spain (see next footnote). Other North African *mensae*, though associated with the cult of relics and martyrs rather than with actual burials, may still be called sepulchral in a wider sense (cf. Cabrol and Leclercq, *op. cit.*, I, col. 828 f., with further references).

Spain,<sup>23</sup> and elsewhere,<sup>24</sup> or they may be placed beside the tomb.<sup>25</sup> Their purpose may have been to serve for liturgical banquets commemorating the dead (particularly martyrs), or for the *agape*, or for ordinary funeral feasts. More frequently they seem to have been used simply to deposit offerings of food and drink for the departed.<sup>26</sup> But most of these tables are on a much smaller scale than that from which our fragment must have come. This is true not only of those that are physically separated from the grave. Even when the *mensa* is an integral part of the tomb the actual top is usually quite small. For instance, in the case of one of the large *mensa* tombs at Tipasa for which full data are available, the sunken sigma-shaped top—as distinct from the sloping surfaces around it which served as a *kline* for the banqueters—had a width of only 1 m.<sup>27</sup> In the cemeteries of Salona, on the other hand, we find a number of marble slabs shaped like table tops and apparently of considerable size. But these are oblong and preserved in such fragmentary condition that the dimensions attributed to them in the reconstruction drawings cannot be accepted as completely certain.<sup>28</sup> No example is known to me of a circular or sigma-shaped grave cover or graveside table of a scale comparable to that of our piece.

<sup>23</sup> J. Serra Vilarò, *Excavaciones en la necropolis romano-cristiana de Tarragona*, Junta superior de excavaciones y antigüedades, 93 (Madrid, 1928), p. 63 ff., tomb no. 129, an example analogous to those at Tipasa (see preceding footnote), i. e., with the sarcophagus encased in a large semicircular masonry block which served as a couch for the reclining banqueters and in the midst of which the table itself was embedded (see especially fig. 25 on p. 64). Other examples are referred to in Serra Vilarò's ensuing report (no. 104 [Madrid, 1929], p. 58 ff.). While it appears that in all instances of similar *mensae* at Tipasa in which any trace of the original surface of the table top remains that surface consisted of an inscription in mosaic (Albertini and Leschi, *op. cit.*, p. 82 f.; *Bulletin archéologique* [1941–42], p. 355 ff.), in the case of tomb no. 129 at Tarragona the table itself is an inscribed marble slab. The top end of this slab repeats the semicircular outline of the masonry block in which it is embedded (Serra-Vilarò, *op. cit.*, no. 93, pl. LII, 2). Theoretically our fragment at Dumbarton Oaks could have come from a slab of similar shape and could have been used in an exactly similar manner.

<sup>24</sup> Under the general heading of "*mensae martyrum* and *agape* tables" Barnea discusses a number of slabs from the Greek East which come from funerary contexts and show cavities suggesting that they were used for depositing food (*op. cit.*, p. 55 ff. and figs 7 and 8; cf. also Orlandos, *op. cit.*, II, p. 480 ff.).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. a *mensa* in the Rotunda at Tipasa adjoining an arcosolium (O. Grandidier, "Deux monuments funéraires à Tipasa," *Atti del II congresso internazionale di archeologia cristiana* [Rome, 1902], p. 51 ff., especially p. 72 f. and figs. 8 and 9). Similar structures exist in the catacombs of Malta (E. Becker, *Malta Sotterranea* [Strasbourg, 1913], p. 112 ff. and pl. XIX ff.). Small plates of glass, terracotta or stucco embedded in masonry plinths are frequently found in positions near tombs in the Roman catacombs (A. M. Schneider, "Mensae oleorum oder Totenspeisetische," *Römische Quartalschrift*, XXXV [1927], p. 287 ff. and pls. XIV–XVII). It is possible that many of the table slabs from the cemeteries of Salona were in positions near tombs rather than on the tombs themselves; this may be particularly true of small uninscribed slabs that are indistinguishable from ordinary domestic utensils (cf., e. g., *Forschungen in Salona*, III, p. 47, no. H/13; also *Archaeologia Jugoslavica*, I [1954], p. 65, no. 10, and figs. 8–10). For Eastern examples of what appear to have been graveside tables cf. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 57 ff. (Melos and Constantza), with further references.

<sup>26</sup> Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity*, p. 110 ff.; Schneider, *op. cit.*; cf. also *id.* in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kulturgeschichte Spaniens*, ed. by H. Finke, V (Münster i. W., 1935), p. 79 f., and F. J. Dölger in *Gnomon*, II (1926), p. 228 f.

<sup>27</sup> Gsell, *op. cit.*, p. 336 (the measurements given for this same tomb by J.-B. Saint Gérard in *Bulletin archéologique* [1892], p. 480 and repeated in part by Leschi, *ibid.* [1938–40], p. 425, are clearly erroneous). The sigma-shaped top of the *mensa* described by Gsell, *op. cit.*, p. 332 f., is of similar size, judging by the scale of the plan, *ibid.*, fig. 150. The corresponding feature of the *mensa* in the Rotunda (note 25, *supra*) measures only 75 × 80 cm. (Grandidier, *op. cit.*, p. 72), while the marble slab embedded in tomb no. 129 at Tarragona (note 23, *supra*) has a width of only 73 cm.

<sup>28</sup> Dyggve, *History of Salonitan Christianity*, fig. V, 28. *Forschungen in Salona*, II, p. 91 ff., fig. 54 ff.; III, pl. 8, figs. H/1–H/10. The slab *ibid.* H/5 and p. 37, fig. 52 f. (cf. *History of Salonitan Christianity*, fig. V, 29), which is almost complete, lacks a funerary inscription and seems to have belonged to the altar of the basilica at Marusinac (*Forschungen*, III, p. 46).

There exists, theoretically, the possibility that our fragment may have come not from a *mensa* tomb or graveside table, but from a sigma-shaped tomb stele. Stelai of this shape have been found in Egypt.<sup>29</sup> Presumably the type developed from *mensa* tombs or graveside tables, and in some instances there is actual evidence of a slab which must originally have been a table top having been put to secondary use as a stele by providing it with an inscription.<sup>30</sup> The change-over from table top to stele, however, almost certainly involved from the beginning a change from a horizontal to a vertical position and, as we have seen, a vertical position is practically out of the question in our case.

Parenthetically, a remark may be added here on a famous sigma-shaped slab from Salona (fig. 12),<sup>31</sup> and, concurrently, on a fragment of what appears to have been an almost identical companion piece now in Vienna.<sup>32</sup> Among all the slabs with border reliefs it is these two that could be imagined most readily in a vertical position. They differ from all other objects of this class known to me in that they show the figures with their feet placed "centripetally," i.e. inward rather than outward. This implies at least a weakening of interest in the functional role of a table top, the decoration of which would be—and was—normally designed to be viewed by the persons surrounding it.<sup>33</sup> The Coptic sigma-shaped stelai, on the other hand, which presumably were intended for a vertical

<sup>29</sup> M. Cramer, "Ein Beitrag zum Fortleben des Altägyptischen im Koptischen und Arabischen," *Mitteilungen des deutschen Instituts für ägyptische Altertumskunde in Kairo*, VII (1937), p. 119ff., especially p. 122f. (with further references) and pl. 20ff.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 122f. and pl. 21 b; also C. Schmit's "Nachtrag," *ibid.*, p. 126f. with pl. 22 b. Dr. Cramer surely was rash in claiming that these table slabs re-used as tomb stelai must originally have been altars. The sigma shape is one of the common forms of tables in general, and, as we have seen, tables were widely used also in funerary contexts (see *supra*, notes 21–28). Table tops from cemeteries, especially when broken, were ready-made material for re-use as tomb inscriptions. A fragment of a table slab with relief border in the Hermitage in Leningrad also bears a—presumably secondary—Coptic inscription (Michon, *op. cit.* [1916], p. 134f., no. 28), but I have not been able to ascertain whether this is of a funerary character.

<sup>31</sup> J. Strzygowski, "Le relazioni di Salona coll'Egitto," *Bullettino di archeologia e storia dalmata*, XXIV (1901), p. 58ff. *Idem*, "Der sigmaförmige Tisch und der älteste Typus des Refektoriums," *Wörter und Sachen*, I (1909), p. 70ff., especially p. 74f. J. Brunšmid, "Kameni spomenici hrvatskoga narodnoga muzeja u Zagrebu," *Vjesnik hrvatskoga arheološkoga društva*, N.S., X (1908–9), p. 149ff., especially p. 213f. Michon, *op. cit.* (1915), p. 509ff. and fig. 6. A. Rücker, "Über Altartafeln im koptischen und den übrigen Riten des Orients," *Ehrengabe deutscher Wissenschaft, dem Prinzen Johann Georg zu Sachsen zum 50. Geburtstag gewidmet* (Freiburg i. B., 1920), p. 209ff., especially p. 214 and fig. 8. J. Braun, *Der christliche Altar*, I (Munich, 1924), p. 278, note 46. Cramer, *op. cit.*, p. 124 and pl. 22 a. *Forschungen in Salona*, III (1939), p. 47 and fig. 55. E. Condurachi, in *Ephemeris Daco-Romana*, IX (1940), p. 1ff., especially p. 56f. and fig. 14. Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 134 and fig. 31. Dyggve, *History of Salonian Christianity*, p. 107 and fig. V, 31. Orlandos, *op. cit.*, p. 486 and fig. 447. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 267, no. 32. A. A. Barb, "Mensa Sacra: The Round Table and the Holy Grail," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, XIX (1956), p. 40ff., especially p. 44 and pl. 8 b. Gerke, *op. cit.* (*supra*, note 10), p. 465.

<sup>32</sup> Kunsthistorisches Museum, Inv. I 360; Noll, *op. cit.*, p. 24, no. 2 ("find spot not known"). Cf. *supra*, note 10. In scale, subject matter, and style there appears to be complete identity between the pieces in Zagreb and Vienna, though there may be some slight difference in the beaded border. The figure on the fragment in Vienna, as distinct from all those on the Zagreb relief, is haloed.

<sup>33</sup> Superficially the arcades opening inward, as we find them on the Zagreb and Vienna pieces, resemble the scalloped borders without reliefs so commonly found on table tops (see, e. g., *infra*, notes 46, 56, 58). But the decoration of the Zagreb and Vienna slabs is really a relief band of the kind characteristic of the table tops studied by Michon, who quite properly included the Zagreb piece in his survey. There is one other known member of that class showing figures under arcades (Michon, *op. cit.* [1916], p. 134f., no. 28), but in this case the arcades open outward and the figures are placed accordingly, so that they stand upright from the point of view of the beholder at the table's edge. In this respect, then, the reliefs at Zagreb and Vienna are entirely exceptional.

position, show their decoration arranged "centripetally," like the Salona and Vienna relief slabs.<sup>34</sup>

From our enquiries so far we conclude that the Dumbarton Oaks fragment is not likely to have come from a sepulchral context. The extraordinarily large size, in conjunction with the curved shape, in effect rules out its use either as a tomb cover or as a graveside table; the size in conjunction with the horizontal position its use as a stele. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility of sepulchral use for other related slabs, especially since the main obstacle is the exceptional size of the Dumbarton Oaks piece.

We turn from the cemetery to the church, where one naturally thinks first of all of the table of the main altar. This, however, in the vast majority of early churches where any evidence still exists was of oblong shape.<sup>35</sup> To what extent sigma-shaped slabs were used for altars in the early Christian period is difficult to decide. There are well known examples in Coptic Egypt which are particularly interesting to us because in some cases they are embedded in masonry blocks, a position for which our piece with its rough edge and back would be well suited.<sup>36</sup> But it is not known whether this type of altar in Egypt goes back to early Christian times. Strzygowski long ago suggested that it does.<sup>37</sup> He recognized the sigma shape as being traditionally associated with ordinary dinner tables and therefore considered it a normal shape to adopt for the Christian altar, the eucharistic service being originally intended as a commemoration of the Last Supper. Actually, the Coptic altars could be derived more plausibly from North African *mensa* tombs,<sup>38</sup> especially since the masonry block supporting the altar slab usually contains an opening which, originally at least, may well have been intended for a relic.<sup>39</sup> Thus these Coptic altars would

<sup>34</sup> Cf., e. g., Cramer, *op. cit.*, pl. 20c, where the base of the cross in the apex of the arch is clearly on the inside.

<sup>35</sup> See in general Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 245ff.; Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 127f.; *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, I (Stuttgart, 1950), col. 334ff., especially col. 342; Orlandos, *op. cit.*, p. 442ff. For Greece cf. also Sotiriou in 'Αρχαιολογική Ἐφημερίς (1929), p. 230; and for the general area of Palestine, Father Bagatti's compilation of measurements of the supports of altars excavated in various churches (B. Bagatti "Gli altari paleo-cristiani della Palestina," *Studii Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus*, VII [1956-57], p. 64ff., especially, p. 71). While the exact size and shape of the slabs which these supports carried may in some instances be uncertain it is obvious that in the great majority of cases the altar was a transverse oblong. For the sigma-shaped slabs discussed by Father Bagatti see *infra*, note 58.

<sup>36</sup> A. J. Butler found two sigma-shaped altar slabs in the churches of Old Cairo (*The Ancient Coptic Churches of Egypt*, I [Oxford, 1884], pp. 118, 221f.; cf. II, p. 7f.), H. G. Evelyn-White a larger number in the monasteries of the Wâdi'n Natrun (*The Monasteries of the Wâdi'n Natrun, Part III: The Architecture and Archaeology* [New York, 1933], pp. 62, 71, 79, 93, 103, 117, 153, 203; cf. p. 18). According to Butler, stone slabs, when they occur at all on Coptic altars, are usually embedded in the masonry block that forms the body of the altar (*op. cit.*, II, p. 7f. and fig. 2, ii; see also I, p. 118). Cf. also Strzygowski in *Wörter und Sachen*, I, p. 72f., and Cramer, *op. cit.*, p. 120 and fig. 4. Evelyn-White, however, in several instances refers to the marble slab noncommittally as "covering" the substructure (*op. cit.*, pp. 18, 93, 117, 153, 203). Only in one case does he say unequivocally that the slab was "inlaid in the upper surface of the masonry" (p. 79). In another case where he found this arrangement it was due to a modern reconstruction (p. 103 with note 1). In two instances he says explicitly that the slab overlapped the substructure (pp. 62, 71; cf. also Rücker, *op. cit.*, fig. 5).

<sup>37</sup> Strzygowski in *Wörter und Sachen*, I, p. 70ff., especially pp. 73ff. and 78. See also Cramer, *op. cit.*, p. 119ff. and Barnea, *op. cit.*, p. 130ff.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 22 (Tipasa).

<sup>39</sup> Butler, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 5, 12ff. Evelyn-White, *op. cit.*, p. 17f., also refers to these openings, but denies that they could have been used for relics.



be an instance where a form connected with the cult of martyrs and relics was adopted for ordinary church use.<sup>40</sup> But even this derivation is purely hypothetical.

J. Lassus claims that sigma-shaped altar tables, as well as oblong ones, were in use in early churches in Syria, but his arguments are based on inference only.<sup>41</sup> Fragments of a plain, sigma-shaped slab found in a small church on the island of Samos are thought to have belonged to the altar of that church,<sup>42</sup> but again the evidence is not conclusive.<sup>43</sup> Numerous other sigma-shaped table slabs have been found in or near churches in many different regions, but in no case is it at all certain that they were in use as altars—or, at any rate, as main altars—and in some instances there is definite evidence to the contrary.<sup>44</sup>

The existence of circular altar slabs is even harder to prove. A J. Butler found one in a small chapel in Old Cairo,<sup>45</sup> but again there is a question of its age. In Besançon a circular marble slab with a scalloped border has served as a high altar in mediaeval and post-mediaeval times, but we cannot be sure that this was its original destination or, for that matter, that it dates back to the early Christian period at all. Even though the type of table top with a scalloped border is ancient, it also exists in numerous mediaeval imitations.<sup>46</sup> Altogether, then, there hardly seem to be sufficient grounds to interpret our fragment as coming from the main altar of a church.

But churches contained other tables than that of the main altar. There may have been secondary altars, though these were infrequent at best in the early

<sup>40</sup> Cf. for this process in general A. Grabar, *Martyrium* (Paris, 1946), *passim*; and, with particular reference to grave *mensae* and altars, Rücker, *op. cit.*, p. 211 ff., and Dyggve, *op. cit.*, p. 109 ff. Strzygowski's theory concerning the origin of the Coptic sigma-shaped altar had at first been also confined to the sphere of the martyrium (*Bullettino di archeologia e storia dalmata*, XXIV [1901], p. 63 f.).

<sup>41</sup> J. Lassus, *Sanctuaires chrétiens de Syrie* (Paris, 1947), p. 200 ff.

<sup>42</sup> W. Wrede, "Vom Misokampos auf Samos," *Athenische Mitteilungen*, LIV (1929), p. 65 ff., especially p. 73, fig. 6, and p. 74. A. M. Schneider, "Samos in frühchristlicher und byzantinischer Zeit," *ibid.*, p. 96 ff., especially p. 108 f.; cf. also the reconstruction *ibid.*, p. 96, fig. 1.

<sup>43</sup> The exact find spot of the fragments is not indicated, and one wonders whether they should not rather be attributed to some other table in the church. The actual traces on the floor of the chancel would seem to fit better an altar of the normal oblong shape (Wrede, *op. cit.*, p. 71, and the plan, Beilage XXXI).

<sup>44</sup> See *infra*, notes 48–50 (Sbeitla), 54 (Sabratha), 55 (Tebtunis), and 58 (many examples).

<sup>45</sup> *Op. cit.*, I, p. 228.

<sup>46</sup> See the recent study by Gerke on the altar of Saint Sernin in Toulouse (for a full reference see *supra*, note 10, à propos of the fragment from Varna) and further literature cited in that study. Ch. Rohault de Fleury argued that the slab in Besançon had been an altar from the outset and attributed it to the seventh century though his illustration is captioned "10th century" (*La Messe*, I [Paris, 1883], p. 160 ff. and pl. 51). H. Leclercq also considered it an altar of an early date (Cabrol and Leclercq, *Dictionnaire*, II, 1 [Paris, 1910], col. 824 f.). Braun, however, thought that it was made in the early eleventh century (*op. cit.*, p. 246 ff. and pl. 42), and more recently P. de Palol has also called it mediaeval ("El baptisterio de la basilica de Tebessa y los altares paleocristianos circulares," *Ampurias*, XVII–XVIII [1955–56], p. 282 ff., especially p. 284). The early dating, on the other hand, has found a tentative advocate in A. A. Barb (*op. cit.*, p. 42 f. and pl. 5 b), who, in line with his theory on the origin of the Holy Grail, is altogether inclined to accept rather readily—probably too readily—potential evidence of the early and widespread use of circular slabs—particularly those with lobed borders—as altars for the eucharistic service (see also *infra*, note 57, à propos of Tebessa). In Gerke's study the Besançon altar figures as a Romanesque work intimately related to early Christian antecedents; in regard to the latter, however, no clear distinction is made between altars and other kinds of tables (*op. cit.*, p. 464 f.). Certainly the Besançon slab—even if it is mediaeval, as it may well be—owes both its shape and its decoration to an early Christian model. But whether that model was an altar is at least doubtful (see also *infra*, note 58).

period with which we are concerned.<sup>47</sup> There certainly were tables on which the faithful deposited their offerings, and others for different liturgical purposes. Excavations of early Christian basilicas have provided ample evidence of such additional tables. One, at least, of the table tops with figure reliefs—and it is these, of course, which interest us primarily—can be safely claimed to fall into this category. I refer to the example from Sbeitla, now in the Bardo Museum at Tunis, which has already been mentioned.<sup>48</sup> This fragmentary piece comes from the excavation of a church in the nave of which another stone slab was found. It is this second slab—oblong in shape—which in all probability was part of the main altar.<sup>49</sup> The fragments with the biblical frieze, on the other hand, were found, not in the nave, but above what remains of the walls of a small apse that belonged to the baptistery behind the main apse of the church.<sup>50</sup> It is tempting to assume that the Sbeitla slab when complete was a sigma-shaped table top which would have fitted neatly into the small apse adjoining the font.

Aside from this example only very few of the table tops with relief borders come from controlled excavations. At Chersonese in the Crimea two fragments were found in the immediate precincts of a church, as the Sbeitla fragments were, but since no trace of the altar was observed there is no way of concluding definitely whether they did or did not form part of the altar.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, there is a number of undecorated table slabs—oblong, circular, or sigma-shaped—which have been excavated on church sites and were clearly used not as altars but in some other liturgical capacity. Thus the annexes and the atrium of Basilica A in Nea Anchialos have yielded fragments of several table slabs, including some with the characteristic scalloped borders,<sup>52</sup> and these are quite distinct from those belonging to the altar of the church.<sup>53</sup> The same is true of a sigma-shaped table found in the Justinianic basilica at the forum of Sabratha. In this church, too, the altar was of the normal oblong shape, and Dom Leclercq has suggested that the additional table may have been used for offerings.<sup>54</sup> Two other instances are particularly interesting because of the fact that table tops were found *in situ* in positions which rule out the possibility of their having been altars for the ordinary eucharistic service. One is in a church at Tebtunis where a sigma-shaped slab was found embedded in the floor in front of the entrance to the right-hand chapel of a tripartite sanctuary (fig. 17). One's

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 368 ff.; *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, I, col. 347 f.

<sup>48</sup> See *supra*, note 11.

<sup>49</sup> Merlin, *op. cit.*, p. 266.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 279; cf. the plan, fig. 1 (before p. 265).

<sup>51</sup> For references see *supra*, note 10.

<sup>52</sup> G. A. Sotiriou, "Αἱ χριστιανικαὶ Θῆβαι τῆς Θεσσαλίας," *Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς* (1929), p. 1 ff., especially p. 101 f. and figs. 135 and 136. Fig. 136 also includes some similar fragments found entirely outside the context of the church. There was also a fragment with relief (fig. 137, top left; cf. *supra*, note 10), but it is not stated whether it was found within the precincts of the church.

<sup>53</sup> For the slab of the altar see *ibid.*, p. 26 and fig. 25 on p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Cabrol and Leclercq, *Dictionnaire*, XV, 2 (1951), col. 1955 f. and fig. 11048 (s. v. "Table d'oblation"). Cf. J. B. Ward Perkins and R. G. Goodchild, "The Christian Antiquities of Tripolitania," *Archaeologia*, LXXXV (1953), p. 1 ff., especially pp. 15, 65 f. Barb's interpretation of this slab, which measures 1.50 × 1.46 m. and is .14 m. thick, as a portable (*sic*) altar is hardly convincing (*op. cit.*, p. 56, note 29).

natural inclination in this case would be to consider it as a table for the offerings. The excavator, however, rejects this possibility (because, so he says, the place where offerings were deposited was elsewhere in the church) and instead suggests that this was the place where the neophytes stood when receiving baptism.<sup>55</sup> While the question must remain open in this case, our second example is quite unambiguous. Excavations carried out a few years ago in the baptistery of the great basilica at Tebessa have revealed that the bottom of the font was formed by a circular slab with a scalloped border (fig. 16), a slab of the type familiar from marble tables such as the one at Besançon.<sup>56</sup> It has been suggested, if only very tentatively, that there may have been a profound symbolic intent in this rendering of the place of baptism as a giant platter or table.<sup>57</sup> The problem merits further study. In any case, however, the Tebessa font affords a striking illustration of the fact that marble table tops were employed in early Christian churches for fittings other than the altar or, for that matter, the table for offerings. One wonders whether other table slabs, and especially slabs of circular or sigma shape, which have come to light—often in indubitably Christian contexts—in many parts of the Mediterranean world have not been interpreted too readily as altars.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> G. Bagnani, "Gli scavi di Tebtunis," *Bollettino d'arte*, XXVII (1933), p. 119 ff., especially p. 124 f. and p. 128, fig. 11.

<sup>56</sup> E. Serey de Roch, "Tebessa (Theveste): Le baptistère de la basilique," *Libyca: Archéologie – Epigraphie*, I (1953), p. 288 ff.

<sup>57</sup> Palol, *op. cit.*, p. 286. Barb's suggestion that the slab, which was subsequently covered with a layer of cement, was placed at the bottom of the font only "for . . . careful hiding . . . at a sacred place" (*op. cit.*, p. 55, note 26) is surely untenable and explicable only by the author's desire to vindicate it as an altar table.

<sup>58</sup> Bagatti, *op. cit.*, p. 66 ff., refers to a number of sigma-shaped slabs, with or without scalloped borders, excavated on ecclesiastical sites in Palestine (for Mount Nebo cf. also S. J. Saller, *The Memorial of Moses on Mount Nebo* [Jerusalem, 1941], p. 291 ff. and pls. 60, 3 and 126, where additional examples are described and illustrated). None of these were found *in situ* and the original use is uncertain in every instance. The same is true of a circular slab with lobed border found in the ruins of a church at Delos (*Ecole française d'Athènes: Exploration archéologique de Delos*, XVIII [Paris, 1938], p. 62 f. and pl. 27, no. 192; cf. *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique*, LVIII [1934], p. 84 ff. and figs. 59–60); of a fragment with a lobed border found at Hippo (*Libyca: Archéologie-Epigraphie*, I [1953], p. 215 f., figs. 1 and 2); and apparently also of a sigma-shaped slab in "Church No. 5" at Leptis Magna (R. Bartoccini, in *Rivista di archeologia cristiana*, VIII [1931], p. 52; Ward Perkins and Goodschild, *op. cit.*, p. 33), though Dom Leclercq (*Dictionnaire*, XV, 2, col. 1956) claims—I have not been able to ascertain on what authority—that at Leptis Magna a fragment was found *in situ* in the pavement (in which case it might be a "floor table" comparable to that at Tebtunis). In the case of sigma-shaped tables found in houses, albeit not far from churches, at Ephesos (*Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Institutes in Wien*, XXVI [1930], Beiblatt, col. 40 and fig. 18) and Stobi (*Glasnik Hrvatskog Zemaljskog Muzeja* [1942], p. 488, fig. 29) it is altogether uncertain whether they may be interpreted as ecclesiastical furnishings. It must always be borne in mind that the same types of tables were in use in indubitably secular contexts (cf., e. g., *Antioch-on-the-Orontes, II: The Excavations of 1933–36* [Princeton, London, and The Hague, 1938], pl. 21, no. 226 and p. 178). Therefore, when the nature of the building that yielded the find is uncertain, as seems to be the case, for instance, in respect of the example from Donnerskirchen (A. A. Barb in *Jahreshefte des österreichischen archäologischen Institutes*, XXXIX [1952], Beiblatt, col. 5 ff.), one cannot claim with any assurance that the slab was in Christian use at all (see also Gerke, *op. cit.*, p. 466, note 1). A sigma-shaped slab from Rubi, near Egara, on the other hand, leaves no doubt in this regard since it bears on the edge a Christian inscription (J. Vives, "Un nuevo altar romano-cristiano en la Tarraconense," *Analecta Bollandiana*, LXVII [1949], p. 401 ff.; P. de Palol Salellas, *Tarraco Hispanovisigoda* [Tarragona, 1953], p. 33 ff. and pl. XIII). But, since the inscription records an individual's private prayer, one may doubt whether the stone could have been intended as an altar in a church. Mention should be made also of an unpublished sigma-shaped table with a lobed border in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, knowledge of which I owe to the kindness of Mr. W. Forsyth. Here again Christian use is certain since the lower frame is adorned with four

Let us return to the table to which the fragment at Dumbarton Oaks belonged. In the light of what has been said it seems likely that this great disk or slab was associated with some secondary piece of church furniture rather than with an altar. The example at Tebessa is particularly suggestive. The extremely large size of our piece is a serious obstacle to any reconstruction envisaging it in an elevated position, but would cause no difficulty if one imagines it embedded in the floor. While reliefs as delicate as those of our fragment — and as sacred in subject matter — would hardly have been put on the open floor, in the manner of the table at Tebtunis, they might well have been fitted into an enclosure such as that of the Tebessa font. We may also recall once more the example at Sbeitla, where the table slab with its Christian reliefs may have been inside the small apse adjoining the font.

Our search has not furnished us with a definite solution to the problem of the use of our slab, let alone of the whole class of related slabs. Our conclusions may be summed up by stating that in this specific case its use either in a sepulchral context or as a main altar in a church is extremely unlikely. The best possibility is that the fragment comes from a table used for offerings or in connection with the rite of baptism, and it may well be that this "table" was embedded in the pavement rather than in a raised plinth.

The history of the class of marble tables to which our fragment belongs remains to be written. The Dumbarton Oaks piece is without doubt not only the largest but also artistically the most outstanding of all. One might, therefore, be tempted to put it at the beginning of the whole series. But this would certainly be a mistake. Normally, these marble tables with relief borders are attributed to dates ranging from the late third to the fifth century.<sup>59</sup> While an exact chronology remains to be established, there are certainly many, at least among the pieces with secular iconography, that are earlier than ours. One must, therefore, conclude that the Constantinopolitan artist of the late fourth century who

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lambs flanking a Chi-Rho. But this piece was acquired in the art market (allegedly it came from Rome) and the possibilities of its use within a Christian context are manifold. This table is interesting also because its decoration comprises most of the elements that occur on the slab at Besançon (see *supra*, note 46). Assuming that the latter is mediaeval its source of inspiration must have been a slab such as that in New York, which is certainly of early date. The problem of early Christian original versus mediaeval copy remains to be studied also in regard to sigma-shaped tables at Mettlach and Vienne (Barb in *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* [1956], pl. 6 b, c; Braun, *op. cit.*, p. 159 with pl. 14, and p. 248), but in any case neither can be claimed with any certainty as an altar.

<sup>59</sup> Xyngopoulos attributed the example from Thera (our fig. 8) to the first quarter of the fourth century, mainly on the strength of a comparison of one of the heads adorning the rim with coin portraits (*Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς* [1914], p. 83; cf. also *ibid.*, p. 263f.). Snyder questioned the validity of this argument without, however, putting forward a substantially different view; for the pieces he discussed he tentatively suggested dates ranging from the late third to the early fourth century (*Journal of Roman Studies* [1923], pp. 65, 68). Michon reviewed the opinions expressed by previous writers on a number of individual pieces and concluded that, while many of the slabs adorned with pagan subjects may be attributable to the fourth century, and in some instances perhaps to the third, those with biblical subjects are not likely to be earlier than the fifth century (*op. cit.* [1916], p. 166ff.). Sotiriou drew a similar distinction between secular and biblical pieces, but suggested that both series were produced mainly within the fourth century (*Ἀρχαιολογικὴ Ἐφημερίς* [1929], p. 233f.). More recently E. Thomas assumed for the whole group much wider time limits ranging from the third to the sixth or even seventh century (*op. cit.—supra*, note 9—p. 274). A systematic investigation of the problem would have to take into account the silver vessels with analogous relief bands, some of which can be dated at least approximately. The type certainly was well established by the late fourth century.

fashioned our table conformed to a well-established type current all over the Eastern Mediterranean area; but only to create a wholly exceptional piece, presumably for one of the great churches of the Imperial capital.

If any further evidence were needed for the attribution of our relief to Constantinople, it could be found in the iconographic analysis.

The scene represented on our fragment is probably that narrated in John 9:1 ff., the episode in which Christ, with clay made with His spittle, anoints the eyes of a man born blind and tells him to wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam, whereupon he gains sight. Among the numerous similar episodes in the Gospels this and the scene at Bethsaida related by Mark (8:22–26) are the only ones which involve Christ touching the eyes of a single blind man. Of the two, John's story is by far the more celebrated. Other possibilities would be the events told in Matthew 9:27 and 29, 30, but these would presuppose that there was originally a second blind man to the left where the relief is now broken. Although, as we have seen, the fragment is incomplete on the right side too, the group of four figures preserved is so well balanced that one would like to assume that no further figures ever formed part of this scene.

It is the impressive figure of the bearded "witness" to the right which at once attracts our attention. In sarcophagus reliefs, where the subject is very common, these "witnesses" are usually anonymous and nondescript. The earliest instances in which they can be identified occur in sixth-century Greek miniatures, specifically in the Gospels of Rossano and Sinope, in which the Healing of the Blind, like most other scenes, is accompanied by figures of Old Testament prophets bearing scrolls which are inscribed with appropriate quotations from their writings.<sup>60</sup> On the basis of these examples the "witnesses" in stone and ivory reliefs depicting the Healing of the Blind and other miracles have also sometimes been identified as prophets.<sup>61</sup> In our case, however, this identification is ruled out by the fact that the figure carries a scepter in the shape of a cross. The person most commonly provided with this attribute is the Apostle Peter.<sup>62</sup> The facial features of the figure on our relief, however, are definitely not those of Peter but of Paul, whose bald head and long beard emerge as unmistakable personal characteristics at a quite early period—witness, for instance, the so-called Prince's Sarcophagus from Constantinople<sup>63</sup> or some of the early fifth-century sarcophagi from Ravenna (compare figs. 14 and 15).

The prominent featuring of the Apostle Paul—certainly most unusual in a scene from the Gospels depicting a miracle of Christ—must be considered a characteristic of Constantinopolitan art of precisely the period to which our relief belongs. Paul was the first apostle to receive individual characterization

<sup>60</sup> Rossano Gospels: A. Muñoz, *Il codice purpureo di Rossano* (Rome, 1907), pl. xi. Sinope Gospels: A. Grabar, *Les peintures de l'évangélaire de Sinope* (Paris, 1948), pl. iv.

<sup>61</sup> E. Capps, Jr., "An Ivory Pyx in the Museo Cristiano and a Plaque from the Sancta Sanctorum," *Art Bulletin*, IX (1926–27), p. 331 ff., especially p. 333 f. and note 24.

<sup>62</sup> M. Lawrence, *The Sarcophagi of Ravenna*, College Art Association Study No. 2 (1945), p. 24 f. with further references.

<sup>63</sup> Kollwitz, *Oströmische Plastik*, p. 140 f. and pl. 47, 1 and 2; our fig. 6.

in the art of the capital, while Peter still remained in the anonymous group of Christ's disciples, witness again the Prince's Sarcophagus.<sup>64</sup> On the strength of Kollwitz' studies it seems very probable that the composition in which Christ gives the Law to Paul—a composition found on the sarcophagi of Ravenna and strikingly different from the well-known Roman representations of Christ giving the Law to Peter—goes back to a Constantinopolitan model.<sup>65</sup> According to Kollwitz one should resist the temptation of seeing in this exaltation of the Apostle of the Gentiles a "political" gesture whereby the New Rome demonstrated its independence vis-à-vis the Old.<sup>66</sup> He suggests that the prominence given to Paul in the art of the capital is simply due to the important role played by the readings from his Epistles in the liturgy, to his travels and activities in that general area, and to the fact that he was the teacher of the church par excellence.<sup>67</sup> While all this is certainly true it does not apply to the Theodosian period more than to any other. The fact that in our relief Paul appears—quite exceptionally—in a miracle scene from the Gospels shows to what length artists in late fourth-century Constantinople went in the "cult" of the Saint. One must reckon with a special vogue and ought to seek an explanation that would apply specifically to this particular phase in Constantinopolitan history.

It may be pointed out in this connection that it was precisely during the last decades of the fourth century that Old Rome began to concentrate on the person of the Apostle Peter as sole founder and first occupant of the Roman see,<sup>68</sup> and that during this same period the church of Constantinople showed an increasing determination to settle its own affairs without Western interference. This latter tendency first became clearly manifest in connection with the Council of 381 convoked by Theodosius I and intended at first as a purely regional gathering.<sup>69</sup> In these circumstances there may well have developed in the imperial capital a trend to "play down" Peter in favor of Paul who was not as definitely identified with a specific see and so was better able to stand for the universal church. It certainly was not a question of opposing to the claim of apostolicity put forward by the see of Old Rome a corresponding claim on behalf of New Rome, where the whole issue of apostolicity had not at that time assumed any great importance.<sup>70</sup> But it may have been felt desirable in the capital to find means of stressing the law and the doctrines that governed the life of the entire church, to which all sees were equally subject, and of which the emperor in Constantinople considered himself the chief guardian. Of that law and of these doctrines Paul had been the first great exponent and his figure could well serve

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141. It is curious, on the other hand, that during the same period Epiphanius of Cyprus should have known of a distinctive type used by artists for St. Peter and of two different types for St. Paul; cf. K. Holl, "Die Schriften des Epiphanius gegen die Bilderverehrung," *Sitzungsberichte der kgl. preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (1916), p. 828 ff., especially p. 839 no. 26 (= *idem*, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte*, II [Tübingen, 1928], p. 362).

<sup>65</sup> Kollwitz, *op. cit.*, p. 154 ff.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156 ff.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>68</sup> See most recently: F. Dvornik, *The Idea of Apostolicity in Byzantium and the Legend of the Apostle Andrew*, *Dumbarton Oaks Studies IV* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 43 ff.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50 ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, chap. II, *passim*; especially pp. 44, 47 f.

to embody and subtly stress those tendencies that Constantinople wished to promote as against those that were increasingly coming to the fore in Old Rome.<sup>71</sup>

These remarks are offered as a possible approach to a problem in the history of Constantinopolitan iconography which has not as yet found a satisfactory solution. It is clear, in any case, that a comprehensive explanation is needed of all the phenomena indicating a particular preference for Paul in East Roman art of the period of Theodosius I. An interpretation solely in terms of the specific scene depicted in the Dumbarton Oaks relief would not be adequate. At the same time it is also true that, given the subject matter of our carving, the inclusion of Paul, however improper from a narrowly historical point of view, was singularly meaningful. Had not Paul himself recovered from blindness through Christ's power? And had he not, in his own words, been sent by God to the Gentiles "to open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light" (Acts 26:18)? He could be identified with the event in both a passive and an active sense. He himself had been a blind man, but also a miracle worker, illuminator and teacher—through the power of Christ Whose cross he carries.

It is tempting to make use of the presence of Paul in our scene for a more precise and pregnant interpretation of its meaning, bearing in mind the possibility that the slab of which it is a part comes from a baptistery.<sup>72</sup> The healing of the blind was one of the natural and obvious themes in a baptismal context. Baptism itself is an act of illumination (φωτισμα, φωτισμός).<sup>73</sup> The symbolism of light played an important part in baptismal liturgy, and by the same token the healing of the blind-born, and particularly his washing his eyes in the pool at Siloam, was often interpreted as a symbol of baptism.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, St. John's account of the miracle was referred to or recited in a number of early liturgies in connection with baptismal or prebaptismal rites.<sup>75</sup> In relation to such speci-

<sup>71</sup> An analogous explanation has been proposed previously by K. Wessel in regard to the sarcophagi at Ravenna on which the scene of Christ giving the Law to St. Paul appears ("Das Haupt der Kirche," *Archäologischer Anzeiger*, LXV-LXVI [1950-51], col. 298ff., especially col. 315f.). Wessel's interpretation has been challenged by Francovich who, however, fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of his own for this iconographic theme (see p. 118ff. of the study quoted *supra* in note 8). For possible manifestations of a "Pauline" trend in Constantinople in subsequent periods see K. Onasch, "Der Apostel Paulus in der byzantinischen Slavenmission," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 4th ser., VI (= vol. 69) (1958), p. 219ff., though this author's conclusions may well go too far (cf. the critical remarks by H. G. Beck in *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 52 [1959], p. 200f.).

<sup>72</sup> See *supra*, p. 32 (Sbeitla, Tebessa).

<sup>73</sup> See Du Cange, *Glossarium*, s. v. φωτίλειν. Cf. Justin Martyr, *Apologia I*, 61 (ed. Otto, I, 1, p. 168); Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* I,6 (Migne, *PG*, VIII, col. 281A) and *Cohortatio ad gentes*, 12 (*ibid.*, col. 240ff.); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Orationes*, 39 and 40 (*PG*, XXXVI, cols. 336, 360ff.). Cf. also the inscription of the font at Djemila in H. Grégoire's convincing interpretation (*Byzantion*, XIII [1938], p. 589ff.).

<sup>74</sup> Cf. e. g. Augustine, *In Joannis Evangelium Tractatus XLIV*, 2 (Migne, *PL*, XXXV, col. 1714); Ambrose, *Epistola LXXX* (*PL*, XVI, col. 1326ff.) and *De sacramentis*, 3,2 (*Florilegium patristicum* [B. Geyer and J. Zellinger, edd.], fasc. 7: *Monumenta eucharistica et liturgica vetustissima* [J. Quasten, ed.], pt. 3 [Bonn, 1936], p. 154); or—to quote an author close in both time and location to the sculptor of our relief—Asterius of Amasea, *Homilia VII* (*PG*, XL, col. 257).

<sup>75</sup> In the early liturgy of Naples John 9:1-38 was read on the Saturday following the third Sunday in lent after the *scrutinium* of the catechumens (A. Dondeyne, "La discipline des scrutins dans l'église latine avant Charlemagne," *Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique*, XXVIII [1932], p. 5ff., 751ff., especially p. 19f.). In the seventh century the same reading is attested in the Roman liturgy on the Wednesday of the fourth week in lent, when the stationary mass was celebrated at S. Paolo f. l. m. (Th. Klauser, *Das*

fically baptismal symbolism, too, the presence of Paul in our relief is singularly appropriate since his own baptism took place simultaneously with the recovery of his sight.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, it was his teaching—and more particularly, of course, his Epistle to the Romans—which provided the fullest and most profound explanation of what baptism means in Christian life.

It seems appropriate to mention this possibility of what would be a very full interpretation of the spiritual content of our scene. But it cannot be more than a possibility since it is by no means certain that our table slab does come from a baptistery. Also, we must not forget that the healing of the blind was only one in a frieze of many episodes, though the little disc with the cross at just this point suggests that the scene did occupy one of the cardinal positions.

Whether or not our scene was meant to have a particular reference to baptism, the presence of St. Paul as an unmistakably identifiable witness singles it out among all early Christian representations of the subject known to me and, indeed, appears to be almost unique altogether. In other respects, however, as I have said, the rendering is not basically different from what we find on other early Christian monuments. Normally, it is true, the composition is arranged in such a way that action develops from left to right. Christ stands at the left and is shown in profile, so that His right arm, with which He touches the eyes of the blind-born, is nearest to the beholder and the action becomes patently obvious.<sup>77</sup> Of the many representations of the scene on early Christian sarcophagi the great majority follows this scheme (fig. 19).<sup>78</sup> However, on a number of frieze sarcophagi which certainly are substantially older than our relief the blind man is placed on Christ's left, perhaps in order to enable the artist to depict Christ Himself in an *en face* view while the action of His right arm inevitably recedes more into the background.<sup>79</sup> It is this arrangement that our artist, clearly more interested in a solemn and statuesque presentation of the Protagonist than in lively and dramatic action, preferred. His choice is not accidental. It enabled him to depict Christ performing the miracle with an air of sovereign ease and composure. The Saviour figure in our relief has the bearing of the true

*römische Capitulare Evangeliorum*, Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen und Forschungen, XXVIII [Münster i. W., 1935], p. 22), and it evidently owes this place in that liturgy to the fact that the miracle symbolized the "illumination" of the catechumens (on the history of the Roman liturgy of that day and its probable relationship to the early history of the *scrutinia*, see Dondeyne, *op. cit.*, pp. 758 ff., 778 ff.; and A. Chavasse, "Le carême romain et les scrutins prébaptismaux avant le IX<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Recherches de science religieuse*, 35 [1948], p. 325 ff., esp. pp. 341, 344, 361 ff., 369; see also Dondeyne, *op. cit.*, p. 781 for evidence of the use of John 9:1 ff. in other Western liturgies during lent). In the Ambrosian rite the miracle of Siloam figured as one of the "types" of baptism in the prayers of consecration of baptismal water (H. Scheidt, *Die Taufwasserweihegebete*, Liturgiegeschichtliche Quellen und Forschungen, XXIX [Münster i. W., 1935], pp. 59, 81; this rite, however, may not be quite so early: cf. *ibid.*, p. 7). It appears to be much more difficult to prove the use of John 9:1 ff. in baptismal contexts in early Greek liturgies.

<sup>76</sup> Acts 9:17 ff. See the commentary on this passage in *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part I: The Acts of the Apostles*, ed. by F. J. Foakes Jackson and K. Lake, IV (London, 1933), p. 104.

<sup>77</sup> Cf., e. g., E. Baldwin Smith, *Early Christian Iconography and A School of Ivory Carvers in Provence* (Princeton, 1918), p. 97 ff., figs. 84, 87, 88–90.

<sup>78</sup> Cf., e. g., G. Wilpert, *I sarcofagi cristiani antichi*, I (Rome, 1929), pls. 29, 3; 91; 92, 2; 96; 111, 2 and 3; 126, 2 (= our fig. 19; note the gnarled stick carried by the blind man as in our relief); 127; 128; etc.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, I, pls. 115, 1; 152, 5; II, pl. 206, 7.



aristocrat. In fact, in a subtle way the whole scene has been recast to assume a courtly dignity. Christ's head is surrounded by a halo—at that time still essentially an imperial attribute. No longer is He portrayed as a curly-haired youth—the saviour boy as imagined by the popular mind of late antiquity—but in the likeness of a prince of the Theodosian house.<sup>80</sup> The blind man whom the sculptors of the sarcophagi had depicted as a little puppet serving solely as a prop to illustrate the action, has become a fully grown person approaching Christ with the humility of the supplicant subject appearing before his sovereign. The cross is, of course, the symbol of Christ's triumph, the scepter of His power; and Paul, the acclaiming witness who carries it, becomes the heavenly ruler's standard bearer, exactly as he is visualized by St. John Chrysostom in the exordium of one of his homilies on the Saint in which the preacher hails Paul's mission to the world in terms of an imperial *adventus*.<sup>81</sup>

The assimilation of Christian to imperial art is a familiar process. As the emperor became God's vice-regent on earth the heavenly court came to be visualized more and more in the image of the earthly one. Beginning with the age of Constantine, this development reached a climax in the very period to which our marble belongs.<sup>82</sup> In this respect again the relief is a characteristic product of its time. Later renderings of the theme retain some, though not all, of the same characteristics. Thus in S. Apollinare Nuovo, one hundred years later, we find a scene composed very similarly to ours.<sup>83</sup> Two blind men are shown here, dressed in the costumes of officials and approaching Christ from the left with gestures similar to that of our figure. The youthful haloed Christ is also reminiscent of ours though his hair is now long. The standard bearer, however, has disappeared. There is only *one* acclaiming witness, an anonymous youthful disciple. Among the numerous examples of the scene on ivory carvings of the fifth and sixth centuries we find the same partial retention of the imperial tenor of our relief. The one which follows its iconography most closely is a box lid from the Sancta Sanctorum Treasure in the Museo Sacro of the Vatican (fig. 20).<sup>84</sup> Although the artist who designed this object reverted to the more common and more "drastic" rendering of the scene, with the blind man—here once more shrunk in size—to the right, Christ in profile, and the action of His arm in the very forefront and center of the panel, the Saviour still retains the essentials of the imperial type of face and the imperial hair style. His footwear also is that of the Christ in our relief. Above all, the figure of the "witness" to the right is very similar, in regard to both the facial type and the acclaiming action of the right hand. Now, however, he is no longer the imperial standard

<sup>80</sup> Kollwitz (*Oströmische Plastik*, p. 164) and Gerke (*Christus in der spätantiken Plastik* [Berlin, 1940], p. 68) have cited Theodosian court portraiture in connection with representations of Christ of this period. In no instance is the relationship as close and striking as in the case of our relief; compare especially our fig. 4 with Kollwitz, *op. cit.*, pl. 34.

<sup>81</sup> *De laudibus S. Pauli Homilia VII* (PG, L, col. 507f.).

<sup>82</sup> Kollwitz, *op. cit.*, *passim*, especially p. 145ff.

<sup>83</sup> F. W. Deichmann, *Frühchristliche Bauten und Mosaiken von Ravenna* (Baden-Baden, 1958), pl. 161.

<sup>84</sup> W. F. Volbach, *Elfenbeinarbeiten der Spätantike und des frühen Mittelalters* (Mainz, 1952), p. 68, no. 138 (with further references) and pl. 46.

bearer. He carries in his left hand a book, not a cross, and perhaps is meant to be an evangelist or even a prophet.

What makes the comparison between our marble and the ivory particularly interesting is the fact that the Sancta Sanctorum panel in turn is the closest forerunner known for any of the reliefs on Maximian's Chair in Ravenna (fig. 21). A lame man on a crutch is added to the Ravenna relief, but otherwise its relationship to the Vatican panel is evident. It is also evident that the latter is a substantially older work. The Sancta Sanctorum ivory is usually considered a work of the fifth or the early years of the sixth century, while the Ravenna Chair belongs to the middle of the sixth. Incidentally, on the Ravenna relief the scepter with the cross reappears, but is now in the hand of Christ.<sup>85</sup>

From its position in iconographic history between the early sarcophagus reliefs, on the one hand, and the group of ivory carvings of which Maximian's Chair is the main exponent, on the other, there emerges the great significance of the Dumbarton Oaks relief for the history of early Christian and early Byzantine art. This significance can be brought out most clearly by means of a brief digression into the Latin West. It is well known that in the West what might be called a gradual regeneration of classical artistic values took place in the course of the fourth century. The extreme abstractness and seemingly deliberate provincialism characteristic of most of the sculptures of the earliest decades of the century and exemplified by the reliefs on the Arch of Constantine and the bulk of the frieze sarcophagi, can hardly be matched in any relief even of the middle of the century. One need only think of the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus dated A.D. 359 with its fully rounded, organically functioning figures, its soft and "positive" drapery style, and its generally classicizing, one might almost say, lyrical atmosphere.<sup>86</sup> This process of regeneration received a great impetus, particularly in Rome, through the well-known pagan reaction movement of the last decades of the century bound up with the names of Q. Aurelius

<sup>85</sup> C. Cecchelli, *La cattedra di Massimiano ed altri avorii romano-orientali* (Rome, 1937), pl. 32. The general scarcity, among ivories of the fifth and early sixth centuries, of clear iconographic and stylistic antecedents for the reliefs of Maximian's Chair is one of the reasons why it has proved so extremely difficult to define the place of these reliefs in the history of early Byzantine art. There is, of course, a sizable group of ivory carvings which are widely accepted as contemporaries and close relatives of those on the Chair, or even as products of the same "school" or workshop (see, e. g., E. Gombrich, "Eine verkannte karolingische Pyxis im Wiener kunsthistorischen Museum," *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen in Wien*, N. F. VII [1933], p. 1 ff., esp. p. 7 ff.; Volbach, *op. cit.*, p. 69). But this fact only serves to make the dearth of forerunners all the more puzzling. In this respect the Sancta Sanctorum panel, which is certainly of a date earlier than Maximian's Chair, is a notable exception. It shows the healing of the blind in a rendering so similar to that on the Chair that there can be no doubt about a close relationship between the two works. The fact that the sculptor of the Chair changed a number of details and added a lame man to the healing scene justifies Cecchelli's denial of the existence of a "prototipo assoluto" for the Ravenna panel (*op. cit.*, p. 179), but does not detract from the importance of its basic similarity to the panel in the Vatican. While Gombrich rightly considers the latter as an antecedent of Maximian's Chair (*op. cit.*, p. 9), K. Wessel obscures the true relationship between the two works by listing the Vatican panel—along with several other undoubtedly pre-Justinianic ivories—among works belonging to the "Umkreis" of Maximian's Chair, without distinguishing between contemporaries and antecedents ("Studien zur oströmischen Elfenbeinskulptur," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Universität Greifswald*, II [1952–53], *Gesellschafts- und sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*, 2, p. 63 ff.; *ibid.*, III [1953–54], 1, p. 1 ff.; see especially p. 2 of the latter volume; also *idem*, "La cattedra eburnea di Massimiano e la sua scuola," *Corsi di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina, Ravenna, 16–29 marzo, 1958*, I [Ravenna, 1958], p. 145 ff., especially p. 150).

<sup>86</sup> F. Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Iunius Bassus* (Berlin, 1936), p. 8 ff.

Symmachus, Virius Nicomachus Flavianus, and other members of the senatorial class.<sup>87</sup> The artistic manifestations of this movement are familiar.<sup>88</sup> They include such pieces as the ivory diptych of the Symmachi and Nicomachi,<sup>89</sup> with its pagan subject matter and its studied and academically precise imitation of figures of the remote classical past. This was a real revival consciously fostered by a small circle of die-hard aristocrats. But artificial as this movement was and limited as it was in time, geographic extent, and social range, it was nevertheless exceedingly important for the future. The main point in our context is that it carried over into Christian art. The links are well known. They lead via the Probianus Diptych,<sup>90</sup> so clearly indebted to the late fourth-century revival, to works such as the relief with the Marys at the Sepulcher from the Trivulzio Collection,<sup>91</sup> or the panel with the same subject in the Bavarian National Museum in Munich.<sup>92</sup> In these works, in which we find the Gospel story endowed with the elegiac charm of a Greek tomb relief, the full debt which the development of Christian art (and particularly Christian narrative art) owed to the pagan revival becomes apparent. As Christian art emerged from the humble and stenographic stage represented by catacomb frescoes and early sarcophagi, it received inspiration and enrichment from the classical revival movement, whose challenge it was called upon to meet and whose influence found expression both in iconographic elaboration, particularly of the Gospel story, and in a new standard of formal perfection. The latter, it is true, was not long maintained. Western ivory carvings of the fifth century show what must be described, from the point of view of classical aesthetics, as a fast falling-off.<sup>93</sup> But the element of humanism that was injected into Christian art in the period about A.D. 400 was never entirely lost and became indeed a part of the heritage of mediaeval Christian art.

In the East this whole process is only much more dimly discernible. What is often referred to as the "Theodosian Renaissance" cannot be set off as clearly as it can in Rome against a wholly different phase in the early fourth century. There is no real equivalent to the reliefs of Constantine's Arch and the whole vogue of officially fostered provincialism which they represent. Nor can we follow a process of regeneration through the fourth century. We have no real concept of the kind of work that was created in Constantinople when the court

<sup>87</sup> A. Alföldi, *A Festival of Isis in Rome under the Christian Emperors of the IVth Century*, Dissertationes Pannonicae, Ser. II, fasc. 7 (Budapest, 1937), p. 37 ff. Cf. also H. Bloch, "A New Document of the Last Pagan Revival in the West," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 38 (1945), p. 199 ff.

<sup>88</sup> R. Delbrück, *Die Consulardiptychen und verwandte Denkmäler* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1929), p. 29 f.; E. P. de Loos-Dietz, *Vroeg-Christelijke Ivoren* (Assen, 1947), p. 83 ff. Cf. also E. Weigand's review of Delbrück's book in *Kritische Berichte zur kunstgeschichtlichen Literatur* (1930-31), p. 33 ff., especially p. 44 ff. and p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> Volbach, *op. cit.*, p. 39, no. 55, and pl. 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41, no. 62, and pl. 18.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58, no. 111, and pl. 33.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57 f., no. 110, and pl. 33.

<sup>93</sup> For the study of the stylistic development in Western ivory carvings of the fifth century A. Hasehoff's paper on a fragment of a diptych in Berlin is still of basic importance ("Ein altchristliches Relief aus der Blütezeit römischer Elfenbeinschnitzerei," *Jahrbuch der kgl. preussischen Kunstsammlungen*, 24 [1903], p. 47 ff.). See also Gombrich, *op. cit.*, p. 5 f., and K. Wessel, "Eine Gruppe oberitalischer Elfenbeinarbeiten," *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts*, 63-64 (1948-49), p. 111 ff.

first moved there. The art of the capital becomes identifiable for us first in the stone sculptures of the Theodosian period with their characteristic soft and mellow style deeply imbued with classicism. The antecedents of this style still elude us.<sup>94</sup> The fact that the Emperor Theodosius, and after him Arcadius, chose to commemorate their victories by means of triumphal columns modelled on those of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, vividly illustrates the retrospective attitude in the official art of the Constantinopolitan court at the end of the fourth century, but the historical motivation, so evident in Rome, is not equally apparent. In the East we can as yet define neither the stylistic setting nor the ideological carriers of Theodosian classicism and must simply accept it as a historical fact.

It has long been recognized that in the East as in the West this secular classicizing art of the late fourth century has a Christian counterpart. Works like the Prince's Sarcophagus (fig. 6)<sup>95</sup> and the fragment from Bakırköy in the Museum of Istanbul depicting standing figures of apostles (fig. 5)<sup>96</sup> are prime examples of this, while the earliest and best of the Ravenna sarcophagi are without any doubt under the direct influence of this Constantinopolitan production.<sup>97</sup> But all the Christian works of pure Theodosian style known so far were ceremonial representations with statuesque figures and a minimum of action, and were lacking in narrative content. It is in this respect that the Dumbarton Oaks relief opens a new perspective. It shows that in the East as in the West a Christian *narrative* art was created under the direct impact of the classicizing taste of the Theodosian period, and that this narrative art—like the ceremonial reliefs just referred to—was deeply affected by the spirit, and, indeed, by the iconography, of the imperial court. Our artist, called upon to carve one of the table border reliefs common at that time throughout the Aegean region, conformed to tradition for its general layout, but created a work unlike any other known member of its class either in scale or in style. He used a familiar Christian theme but recast it in the mould of Theodosian court art. One must speak here of a regeneration of Christian narrative art similar to that in the West.

Christian narrative reliefs of a more derivative kind from the general area of the Eastern capital have been known for a long time. One which is of particular interest to us is a fragment from the neighborhood of Sinope, now in the Berlin Museum (fig. 18). Though this is a substantially later work it evidently stands in the direct tradition of our relief with which it has a close iconographic relationship. Indeed, viewing the two carvings side by side one cannot entertain any doubt that Wulff was correct in interpreting the Berlin piece as a fragment of a scene depicting one of Christ's miraculous healings.<sup>98</sup> The figure in profile to the left is identical in attitude and attire to our blind man except that it faces in the opposite direction. It thus presupposes a Christ figure of the more usual kind, i.e. turning towards the right. The witness on the right is an exact counter-

<sup>94</sup> Kollwitz, *Oströmische Plastik*, pp. 1, 143.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pls. 45-47 and p. 132 ff.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, pl. 48 and p. 153 ff.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. *supra*, note 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Op. cit.* (*supra*, note 19), p. 18, no. 29.

part, in position, gestures, and attribute, to our St. Paul. The facial features, however, clearly show that he is meant to be St. Peter and thus the figure serves to point up once more the fact that the iconographic emphasis on St. Paul, which our relief bespeaks, was indeed a passing phase. Stylistically the contrast between the two works is considerable. Evidently, by the time the Sinope relief was made the process of hardening and schematization which took place in Eastern as in Western sculpture in the course of the fifth century was well advanced. The carving has been attributed convincingly to the middle of the fifth century.<sup>99</sup>

Another fragment—this one found in the capital itself and now preserved in the Museum of Istanbul—is much closer to ours in style and in date.<sup>100</sup> It, too, depicts a miracle scene—the Raising of the Widow's Son—and thus provides a further indication of the interest which Constantinopolitan artists of the late fourth and early fifth century took in scenes from the Gospels. But it does not show as clearly as does our carving how deeply and intimately this Christian narrative sculpture of the capital is rooted in the art of the court of Theodosius I. The Dumbarton Oaks relief must surely be a product of the imperial atelier, which may not be true of any of the other Christian carvings referred to, with the exception of the Prince's Sarcophagus. The chief significance of our small fragment, then, lies in the fact that it allows us for the first time to grasp, so to speak, the moment when in the capital the spark was transmitted from imperial to Christian narrative art. The narrative reliefs previously known, less close to the art of the court in style and iconography, merely permitted the inference that such a transmission must have taken place. Our fragment provides tangible evidence of this transmission and shows that in the period of Theodosius I Constantinople began to take a hand in the shaping of Gospel subjects, imbuing them with its own characteristic style and spirit. Even at this relatively early date the development of New Testament iconography in the East had ceased to be a monopoly of Syria and Palestine.<sup>101</sup>

A further point is equally important. None of the previously known early reliefs with Christian scenes from the Constantinopolitan region are closely connected with subsequent developments. In the case of our representation of the Healing of the Blind we believe we have discerned iconographic links with

<sup>99</sup> K. Wessel, "Ein kleinasiatisches Fragment einer Brüstungsplatte," *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Forschungen und Berichte*, I (1957), p. 71 ff. Wessel's dating has been criticized by Francovich in his recent study on Ravenna sarcophagi quoted *supra* in note 8. The Italian scholar attributes the Sinope relief to the end of the fourth century, because of alleged affinities with sculptures of the Theodosian period and particularly with some of the reliefs on the base of the Obelisk (p. 73 f. and note 123). However, a comparison with the Dumbarton Oaks carving, a work so similar to the Sinope relief in subject matter and composition, serves to bring out those stylistic features whereby the latter work differs from sculptures of the time of Theodosius I, and thus helps to confirm Wessel's dating as against Francovich's.

<sup>100</sup> Kollwitz, *op. cit.*, pl. 55, 1 and p. 188.

<sup>101</sup> *A fortiori* the thesis of G. de Francovich that throughout the pre-Iconoclastic period artists in Constantinople on the whole fought shy of illustrating the Gospel story is plainly untenable ("L'arte siriana e il suo influsso sulla pittura medioevale nell'oriente e nell'occidente," *Commentari*, II [1951], pp. 3 ff., 75 ff., especially p. 78 ff.). Cf. also my remarks in *Byzantine Art in the Period between Justinian and Iconoclasm*, *Berichte zum XI. Internationalen Byzantinisten-Kongress*, IV, 1 (Munich, 1958), p. 37, note 141.

later works, and especially with an important group of ivories of which Maximian's Chair in Ravenna is the chief exponent. While all of the imperial connotations of our relief were not retained in these later examples the tradition nevertheless lingered on. When speaking of the West we found that lasting importance attached to the innovations introduced into Christian pictorial art during the late fourth century. Now we can see that the same is true in the East where the impact of the "Theodosian Renaissance" can likewise be claimed to have been of long duration. In the East, too, the high standards of refined classicism characteristic of the late fourth century were lost rather rapidly in the course of the fifth, as both stone and ivory sculptures of that period show. But Eastern ivory carvers of the advanced fifth and sixth centuries, like their Western counterparts, can now be seen to have been indebted to a distinctive phase of metropolitan art of the Theodosian period. As is well known, many of these ivories have frequently been attributed to workshops in Egypt.<sup>102</sup> The Dumbarton Oaks relief, of course, cannot by itself be decisive in determining their place of origin, but it does show that some of their most important antecedents lie in Constantinople.

Thus the art of the capital in the Theodosian period can be shown to have played a crucial role in the over-all development of Christian art. Established formulae of Christian iconography, familiar patterns long used by the craftsmen of the region, were remolded to conform with the official manner of presentation and with the classicizing standards of form evolved by the imperial ateliers. The action of these Constantinopolitan workshops may be compared to that of an optical lens in which rays from various sources are gathered and concentrated to be re-emitted with new force to illumine the path ahead. Our carving permits us to define this achievement much more sharply than was possible previously. It leads us directly into the main current of Greek Christian art and is, indeed, a key piece, showing as it does that as early as A.D. 400 art had its focus in Constantinople and hence should be called Byzantine.

<sup>102</sup> See, for instance, K. Wessel's "Studien zur oströmischen Elfenbeinskulptur," quoted *supra* in note 85. In his study of 1958, quoted in the same footnote, Wessel offers a somewhat modified version of his thesis regarding the origin of Maximian's Chair.



1. Dumbarton Oaks Collection. Marble Relief showing Christ Healing a Blind Man





2.

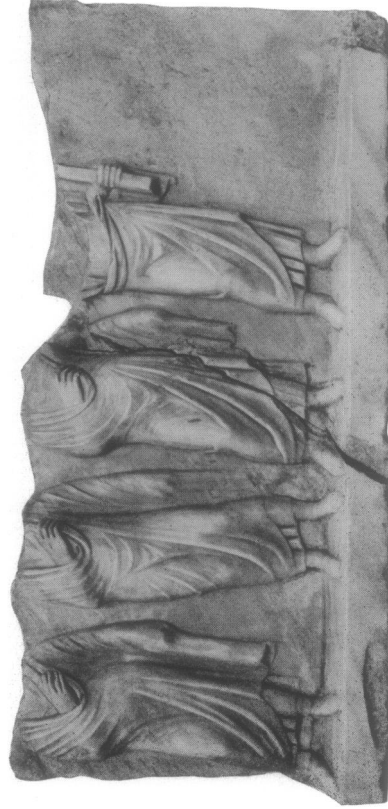
Istanbul, Atmeydan (Hippodrome). Base of Obelisk,  
details of Reliefs of the Period of Theodosius I



3.



4. Relief shown in figure 1, detail: Head of Christ

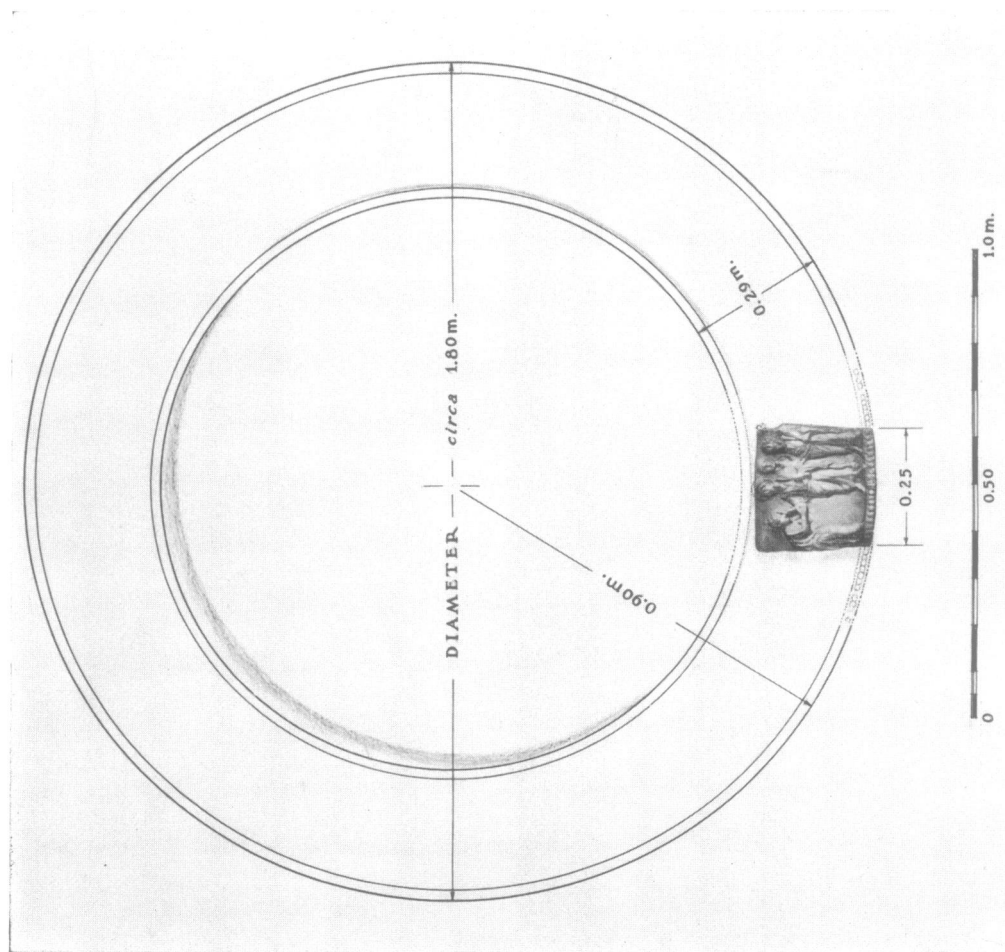


5. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum. Relief found at Bakırköy



6. Istanbul, Archaeological Museum. So-called  
Sarcophagus of a Prince, detail





8. Athens, Byzantine Museum. Table Top found on the Island of Thera

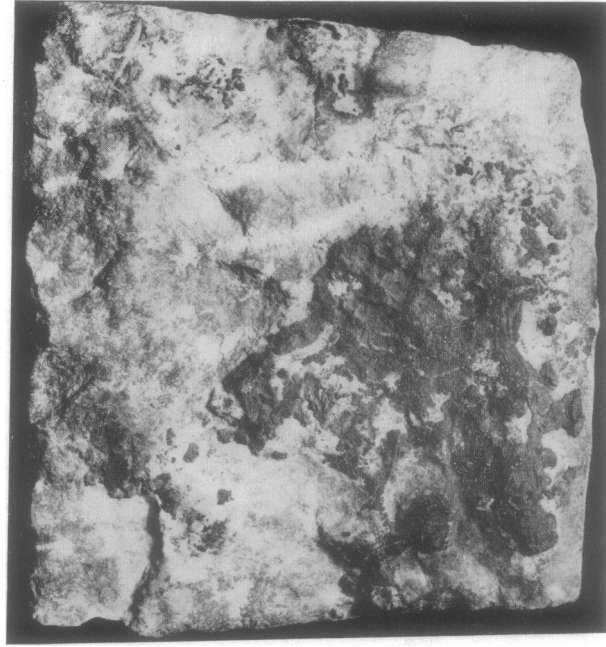
7. Tentative Reconstruction of Table Top incorporating Fragment shown in figure 1



9. Relief shown in figure 1: View of lower edge



10. Relief shown in figure 1: View of right edge



11. Relief shown in figure 1: Back



12. Zagreb, Archaeological Museum. Fragment of Table Top (?) found at Salona



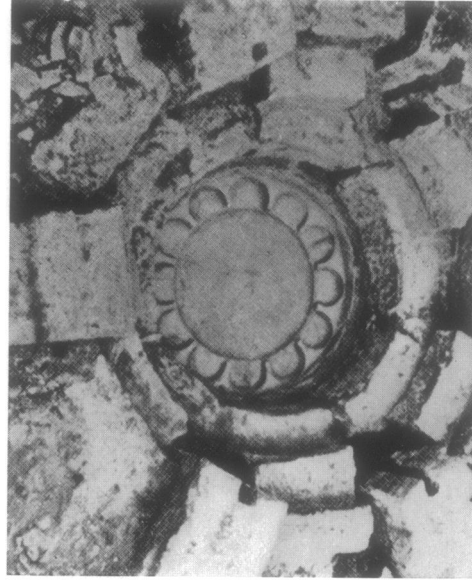
13. Relief shown in figure 1, detail:  
Head of Blind Man



14. Relief shown in figure 1, detail: Heads



15. Ravenna, Cathedral. Sarcophagus of Exuperantius,  
detail: Head of St. Paul



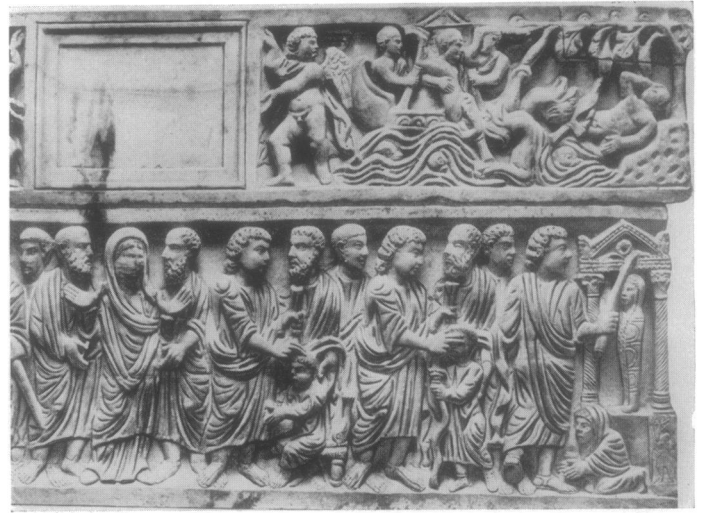
16. Tebessa, Baptistery. Font



17. Tebtunis, Church. View of south Chapel showing  
Table Slab set in Floor at Entrance



18. Berlin, State Museums. Fragment of Relief found near Sinope



19. Rome, National Museum. Frieze Sarcophagus, detail: Miracles of Christ



20. Vatican, Museo Sacro. Ivory Box Lid, showing Christ Healing a Blind Man



21. Ravenna, Archbishop's Palace. Ivory Chair of Bishop Maximian, detail: Christ Healing a Blind and a Lame Man